

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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October 22, 2009

TO:

Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman

Supervisor Gloria Molina

Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich J. Watale

FROM:

Wendy L. Watanabe

Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT:

ALPHA TREATMENT CENTERS FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY - A

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER

We have completed a contract compliance review of Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency (Alpha or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Alpha, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster parents for the supervision of children DCFS places in foster care. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Alpha is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 31 certified foster homes in which 62 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Alpha operates offices in the First and Fifth Districts.

DCFS pays Alpha a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Alpha receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between \$624 and \$790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Alpha approximately \$1,274,000 during Fiscal Year 2008-09.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of our review was to determine whether Alpha was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed the Agency's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed the children and the foster parents.

Results of Review

The foster parents indicated that the services they received from Alpha generally met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. Alpha also ensured that staff working on the County contract possessed the education and experience qualifications required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Alpha ensured social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by CDSS Title 22 regulations. However, Alpha did not always comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Specifically:

One of the six foster parents violated CDSS Title 22 regulations by leaving two
foster children in the home without adult supervision while the foster parent went to
the pharmacy to pick up a prescription with another foster child. When we arrived
at the home for our monitoring visit, the foster parent was not home and two
children, ages 13 and 16, were unsupervised. The County contract and CDSS
Title 22 regulations do not allow children to be left unsupervised unless agreed to
in advance by Alpha, the children's DCFS social worker and CDSS Community
Care Licensing (CCL).

Upon learning that the two children had been left in the home without adult supervision, we immediately made a referral to DCFS' Child Protection Hotline (CPH) and CDSS' CCL. We also notified DCFS' Out of Home Care Management Division. The following day, the DCFS CPH sent a DCFS Emergency Response social worker to investigate the referral that the children were left unsupervised. According to the Emergency Response social worker, the allegation that the children were left unsupervised was unfounded. DCFS subsequently indicated that the DCFS Emergency Response social worker acknowledged that the youth (ages 16 and 13) were left unsupervised for a short period of time. However, based on their age and level of functioning, it was determined that abuse or neglect did not occur as defined in the Penal Code and Welfare and Institutions Code.

A CDSS CCL analyst also investigated the referral and cited Alpha on two grounds for leaving the children unsupervised and for requiring the 16 year old child to baby-sit the 13 year old child. Alpha took immediate action by developing a corrective action plan which required the foster parent to sign a declaration indicating she would not leave the foster children unsupervised in the future. In

addition, Alpha held an emergency meeting with all their foster parents to discuss CDSS Title 22 regulations. Subsequent to our review, the foster parent left Alpha and went to another agency.

- One of the four foster homes visited did not adequately secure prescription medications and knives as required.
- Two of the four homes visited were not assessed by Alpha to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the homes. At the time of our review, the homes had four and five children, respectively.
- Four of the 10 Quarterly Reports reviewed were not prepared timely. The four Quarterly Reports were prepared an average of nine days late.
- The 10 Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) reviewed did not always contain all the required information. Specifically, three of the NSPs were not prepared timely, two of the NSPs were not approved by the DCFS social workers, and eight of the NSPs contained goals that were not specific, measurable and time-limited as required. In addition, three of the NSPs did not contain documentation that the children or the children's foster parents were offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs. Further, two of the NSPs did not contain documentation that the children's DCFS social worker was provided with monthly updates on the children's progress.
- One of the five children taking psychotropic medication did not have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. However, the child was being seen by his physician and we confirmed with the child and the foster parent that the child was taking his prescribed medication. Subsequent to our review, Alpha provided the required documentation.
- Three of the 10 children's initial medical examinations were not conducted timely. The three initial medical examinations were conducted an average of 11 days late. In addition, one of the three children's initial dental examination was conducted 35 days late.
- One of the 10 children did not receive ongoing dental services. This child missed four consecutive orthodontic appointments, causing the orthodontist to consider terminating services. The County contract requires Alpha to monitor to ensure that children receive necessary dental services.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Board of Supervisors October 22, 2009 Page 4

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Alpha on July 13, 2009. In their attached response, Alpha management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations (Attachment I). We also notified DCFS of the results of our review. In their response (Attachment II), DCFS indicates the actions they took in regards to the safety findings noted in this report. DCFS also indicates that they will follow up on our recommendations during their next monitoring review tentatively scheduled for January 2010.

We thank Alpha for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:JET:DC:AA

Attachments

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Daryl Hale, Chair, Board of Directors, Alpha Treatment Centers FFA
Emmanuel Humphries, Executive Director, Alpha Treatment Centers FFA
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM ALPHA TREATMENT CENTER FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY FISCAL YEAR 2008-09

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency (Alpha or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited four of the 31 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Alpha billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in October and November 2008, and interviewed four foster parents and eight foster children placed in the four homes. We also observed one toddler who was too young to interview. In addition, we reviewed the case files for six foster parents and ten children and we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster parents indicated that the services they received from Alpha generally met their expectations and the children indicated they enjoyed living with their foster parents. The toddler we observed appeared well cared for and happy.

Alpha needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations and that foster parents do not leave children unsupervised. Alpha also needs to ensure Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) and Quarterly Reports contain all the required information and are prepared within the required timeframes. In addition, Alpha needs to ensure that children's dental and medical examinations are conducted within the required timeframes. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation

• One (17%) of the six foster parents violated CDSS Title 22 regulations by leaving two foster children in the home without adult supervision while the foster parent went to the pharmacy to pick up a prescription with another foster child. When we arrived at the home for our monitoring visit, the foster parent was not home and two children, ages 13 and 16, were unsupervised. The County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations do not allow children to be left unsupervised unless agreed to in advance by Alpha, the children's DCFS social worker and CDSS Community Care Licensing (CCL).

Upon learning that the two children had been left in the home without adult supervision, we immediately made a referral to DCFS' Child Protection Hotline (CPH) and CDSS' CCL. We also notified DCFS' Out of Home Care Management Division. The following day, the DCFS CPH sent a DCFS Emergency Response social worker to investigate the referral that the children were left unsupervised. According to the Emergency Response social worker, the allegation that the children were left unsupervised was unfounded. DCFS subsequently indicated that the DCFS Emergency Response social worker acknowledged that the youth (ages 16 and 13) were left unsupervised for a short period of time. However, based on their age and level of functioning, it was determined that abuse or neglect did not occur as defined in the Penal Code and Welfare and Institutions Code.

A CDSS CCL analyst also investigated the referral and cited Alpha on two grounds for leaving the children unsupervised and for requiring the 16 year old child to baby-sit the 13 year old child. Alpha took immediate action by developing a corrective action plan which required the foster parent to sign a declaration indicating she would not leave the foster children unsupervised in the future. In addition, Alpha held an emergency meeting with all their foster parents to discuss CDSS Title 22 regulations. Subsequent to our review, the foster parent left Alpha and went to another agency.

- One (25%) of the four foster homes visited did not adequately secure prescription medications and knives as required.
- Two (50%) of the four homes visited were not assessed by Alpha to determine the foster parents' ability to effectively care for more than two children prior to placing more than two children in the homes. At the time of our review, the homes had four and five children, respectively.

Quarterly Reports and Needs and Services Plans

- Four (40%) of the 10 Quarterly Reports reviewed were not prepared timely. The four Quarterly Reports were prepared an average of nine days late.
- Three (30%) of the 10 Needs and Services Plans (NSPs) reviewed were not prepared timely. The three NSPs were prepared an average of 53 days late.
- Eight (80%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed contained goals that were not specific, measurable and time-limited as required.
- Two (20%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed were not approved by the DCFS social workers as required. Our prior review also noted that Alpha did not always ensure that NSPs were approved by the DCFS social workers.

- Three (30%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed did not contain documentation that the children or the children's foster parents were offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.
- Two (20%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed did not contain documentation that the children's DCFS social worker was provided with monthly updates on the children's progress.

Medical Services

- One of the five children taking psychotropic medication did not have a current court authorization for the administration of the medication. However, the child was being seen by his physician and we confirmed with the child and the foster parent that the child was taking his prescribed medication. Subsequent to our review, Alpha provided the required documentation.
- Three (30%) of the 10 children's initial medical examinations were not conducted timely. The three initial medical examinations were conducted an average of 11 days late. In addition, one of the three children's initial dental examination was conducted 35 days late.
- One (10%) of the 10 children did not receive ongoing dental services. This child missed four consecutive orthodontic appointments, causing the orthodontist to consider terminating services. The County contract requires Alpha to ensure that children receive the necessary dental services.

Recommendations

Alpha management ensure:

- 1. Foster parents do not leave children unsupervised unless agreed to in advance by the Agency, the DCFS social worker and CDSS Community Care Licensing.
- 2. Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.
- 3. Foster parents adequately secure medications, knives and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children.
- 4. Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.
- 5. Quarterly Reports and NSPs are prepared within the required timeframes.

- 6. NSPs contain all the required information including goals that are specific, measurable and time-limited.
- 7. NSPs are approved by the DCFS social worker.
- 8. Children and their foster parents are offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.
- 9. DCFS social workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.
- 10. Current court authorizations are maintained for children taking psychotropic medications.
- 11. Children's medical and dental examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.
- 12. Children receive necessary dental services.

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Alpha billed to DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed eight children placed in four Alpha certified foster homes and interviewed four foster parents to confirm the services Alpha billed to DCFS. In addition, we observed one toddler who was too young to interview.

Results

The foster children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the toddler appeared well cared for and happy. All four foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether Alpha social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Alpha's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

Alpha's six social workers carried an average caseload of 13 cases and the Agency's two supervising social workers each supervised three social workers.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

Objective

Determine whether Alpha staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed Alpha's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

<u>Results</u>

Alpha's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Alpha conducted the required hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

None.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP

Objective

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the Auditor-Controller's prior monitoring review.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on August 21, 2006.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained three outstanding recommendations. Alpha implemented two of the recommendations. As indicated earlier, the finding related to recommendation seven in this report was also noted in the prior monitoring review.

Recommendation

13. Alpha management implement the outstanding recommendation from the prior monitoring report.



Marilyn Lang. M.S. Executive Director

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July 13, 2009

TO:

Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman

Supervisor Gloria Molina

Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky

Supervisor Michael D Antonovich

From:

Jean Jones, LCSW Social Services Director Alpha Treatment Centers

Subject:

Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency's Contract Review Correction Action

Plan

This report will serve as Alpha Treatment Centers Foster Family Agency's Corrective Action Plan for the following Findings:

1) Recommendation: Foster parents do not leave children unsupervised unless agreed to in advance by Alpha and the children's DCFS social worker, and CDSS Community Care Licensing.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers held an emergency training and retrained all of our certified foster parents and social workers on the regulations of leaving foster children home alone. All foster parents and ATC Social Workers were explained that no foster child could be left home alone for any amount of time for any reason without the written consent from CDSS Community Care Licensing, the DCFS Social Worker and Alpha Treatment Centers. It was reinforced that written consent was required from all I three parties, CDSS Community Care Licensing, the DCFS Social Worker and the ATC Social Worker. All ATC Foster parents and ATC SWs signed that they understood and would abide by the regulations. The certified foster parent that had left the children home alone was told by the DCFS Social Workers that the foster children could be left home alone. This foster parent was also retrained, although she was fater decertified with ATC. It should be noted that this home was through the Palmdale office, since the time of the audit, the Palmdale

office has been closed, and all LA County homes are certified and monitored through the Pomona office.

2) Recommendation: Staff adequately monitors foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Corrective Action Plan: All certified foster parents and ATC Social Workers were retrained on the regulations regarding securing medications. The foster parents were retrained to lock all prescription, over-the-counter and vitamins, including refrigerated medication. The social workers were retrained to continue to monitor the homes on a monthly basis to ensure compliance. The foster parents signed that they understood and would comply with the regulations. A new inspection form has been implemented for the monthly walk-thru.

3) Recommendation: Foster parents adequately secure medications, knives, and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment centers retrained the foster parent to lock all sharp objects, including knifes. We further retrained the foster parents that, if a CSW signed NSP allows teenage foster children to use knifes, this does not mean that knives can be left unlocked. They we retrained that all knives and sharps have to be locked when not in use. The Social workers were retrained that all sharps had to be locked, even if the CSW stated that the foster child was able to use them. The Social Workers will monitor for compliance on a monthly basis. A new inspection form has been implemented for the social workers monthly walk-thru.

 Recommendation: Foster home assessments are completed for homes where more than two children are placed.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers will be completing an assessment of the home at the time of a placement of more than two children to ensure it is safe and appropriate to place more than 2 children in the home. It should be noted that all homes without assessments were from the Palmdale office, since the time of the audit, the Palmdale office has been closed and the homes are certified through the Pomona office.

 Recommendation: Quarterly Reports and NSPs are prepared within the required timeframes.

Corrective Action Plan: The Social Services Director is monitoring all NSP and Quarterly reports to ensure they are turned in, reviewed, and malled to the CSW, within the required time limit. It should be noted that the late NSPs/Quarterlies were all from the Palmdale office, the Palmdale office was closed and all social workers are associated and supervised under the Pomona office.

 Recommendation: NSPs contain all the required information including goals that are specific, measurable, and time-limited.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers Social Workers have been given training to develop Goals that are specific, measurable and time-limited. These trainings will be ongoing.

7) Recommendation: NSPs are approved by the DCFS Social Worker

Corrective Action Plan: Currently Alpha Treatment Centers mails the Needs and Service Plan with an extra copy of the signature page and a self-addressed envelope in hopes to expedite the return of the signature page. Alpha Treatment Centers will monitor the return of the signature page of the "NSP CSW Signature Page Log". ATC will call the social worker and document the call if the NSP signature page is not returned in one week. If ATC has not received the signature page after two weeks, we will call the CSW and document. If ATC has not received the NSP after three weeks, we will call the CSW Supervisor. It should be noted that all NSPs that were not approved were from the Palmdale office, this Palmdale office was closed after the audit; all files (which contain the NSPs) are kept and monitored through the Pomona office.

8) Recommendation: Children and their foster parents are offered the opportunity to participate in the development of the NSPs.

Corrective Action Plan: The social workers will review the draft NSPs with the foster parents and the age-appropriate foster children and ask for input and comments prior to the final draft of the NSP. The foster parents and the age-appropriate foster children will then sign the NSP. It should be noted that all the NSPs that the children and foster parents did not participate were in the Palmdale office. This office has been closed and the NSPs are now monitored in the Pomona office.

 Recommendation: DCFS Social Workers are updated monthly regarding the children's progress.

Corrective Action Plan: The social workers were trained to contact the CSW at least monthly to update the social workers on the child's progress. They are also to document the contact on our "Monthly CSW and School Contact Log". It should be noted all files which did not document monthly CSW contacts were in the Palmdale office, this office was closed after the audit.

10) Recommendation: Current court authorizations are maintained for children taking psychotropic medications.

Corrective Action Plan: Children on Psychotropics are reviewed monthly for updated court authorizations. ATC SW will call the psychiatrist and CSW 6 weeks prior to the expiration of the current psychotropic authorization to remind the psychiatrist to complete and fax a new psychotropic authorization to the courts. ATC will also fax a second reminder to the psychiatrist 3 weeks prior to the expiration of the current psychotropic authorization.

11) Recommendation: Children's medical and Dental examinations are conducted within the required timeframes.

Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers retrained the foster parents regarding the timeframe required for both the medical and dental exams. ATC Social Workers will also help either make the appointments or transport the child to the appointment if there is a conflict.

- 12) Recommendation: Children's necessary dental services are received.
 Corrective Action Plan: Alpha Treatment Centers retrained the foster parents regarding the requirements regarding both dental and medical exams. The ATC SW will ensure that the foster children receive their dental and medical exams as stated by the county contract and Title 22 regulations.
- 13) Recommendation: Alpha management implements the outstanding recommendation from the prior monitoring report.

Corrective Action Plan: Please refer to Alpha Treatment Center's recommendation in #7 in this report.

We thank the Auditor Controllers office for their professionalism during our Contract Review. We were given valuable feedback from our auditor. If you have any questions please call Jean Jones at 909-624-2123.

Sincerely, Jan Jones, LCSW

Jean Jones, LCSW
Social Services Director

Alpha Treatment Centers



County of Los Angeles DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020 (213) 351-5602

September 17, 2009

Board of Supervisors
GLORIA MOLINÁ
First District
MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Second District
ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District

TO:

Aggie Alonso, Chief Accountant-Auditor Countywide Contract Monitoring Division

DON KNABE Fourth District MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH

RICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH Fifth District

FROM:

Elizabeth AT Howard, Section Head Out of Home Care Management Division

Foster Family Agency/Group Home Performance Management

DCFS RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S CONTRACT REVIEW OF ALPHA TREATMENT CENTERS FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

The Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) has reviewed the Auditor-Controller's (A-C) July 16, 2009 final draft report of the contract compliance review of Alpha Treatment Centers FFA. The A-C's July 16, 2009 draft report references a January 21, 2009 referral they made to the Child Protection Hotline (CPHL) during their review. The referral alleged general neglect as a result of lack of supervision. Specifically, the certified foster parent left two teenage foster children at home without adult supervision while she transported a recently placed foster child to a doctor's appointment. The A-C informed the OHCMD of the referral on January 23, 2009 via email.

On January 26, 2009, OHCMD contacted Alpha FFA and found that they were notified of the referral by the A-C on January 21, 2009. As a result of the referral, the agency social workers conducted an immediate visit to the certified home to ensure child safety and explain that their policy does not allow any placed children to be left home alone. Alpha had the certified foster parent sign an agreement to comply with their policy. The agency also reviewed the certified foster parent's file for any other incidents. The youth remained placed in the home as the certified foster parent was immediately counseled on the issue of lack of supervision. Through further query, we also learned that the DCFS CSW previously granted the certified foster parent approval to leave the youth alone for an hour or two. The OHCMD informed the DCFS case-carrying CSW that leaving youth alone violates Title 22 regulations, and she agreed to comply.

While Community Care Licensing concludes their investigations based on Title 22 Regulations, DCFS investigations incorporate the Penal Code, the Welfare Institution Code,

ALPHA TREATMENT CENTERS FFA PAGE 2

and their own policies when arriving at the appropriate findings. After interviewing all parties involved, including the foster mother and youth in the home, the investigating ER CSW assessed the allegation of general neglect to be unfounded based on language defined in the Penal Code and Welfare and Institutions Code. Although the referral was deemed unfounded by the investigating CSW and the certified foster parent in question later voluntarily decertified, OHCMD requested immediate action for which Alpha FFA provided an approved Corrective Action Plan (CAP) dated January 26, 2009, which included re-training of all certified foster parents on the supervision of placed youth.

Although the emergent child safety issue was immediately addressed and resolved, we also noted the A-C's final draft report mentioned that prescription medications and knives were not adequately secured. To that end, during OHCMD's March 2009 review, we visited eight different homes and found that there were no concerns regarding this finding. The A-C's final draft report notes non-emergent programmatic issues (i.e., various NSP/Quarterly Report findings, untimely medical/dental examinations, and no assessments by the FFA to determine the CFPs' ability to care for more than two children prior to their placement), for which we will conduct a follow-up review based on the A-C's recommendations, tentatively scheduled for January 2010.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (626) 569-6804.

MG:EAH:NF

c: Wendy L. Watanabe, Auditor-Controller Patricia Ploehn, Director, DCFS Lisa Parrish, Deputy Director, DCFS Marilynne Garrison, Division Chief, DCFS